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SUBJECT: NICARAGUA NOMINATION FOR THE SECRETARY'S AWARD FOR
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE

REF: 12871

¶1. (U) After careful consideration of several potential candidates for Secretary Rice's Women of Courage Award, Post nominates Zoilamerica Narvaez Murillo for this distinction. Despite the repeated denial of due process in the national courts, Zoilamerica has persevered in her quest for justice in her long-standing case of sexual abuse and rape against her stepfather, President Daniel Ortega. Through her work with the think tank Center for International Studies and her foundation Sobrevivientes (Survivors), and her willingness to share her story with the press, human rights groups, and women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Zoilamerica has demonstrated outstanding leadership and courage. Her ability to turn a painful personal struggle into a cause on behalf of other women and girls, and the unprecedented nature of her case puts her in the ranks of women deserving international recognition for courage.

¶2. (U) Nominee: Zoilamerica Narvaez Murillo

¶3. (U) Title, Institution: Executive Director of the think tank Center for International Studies, and founder Sobrevivientes (Survivors), a foundation dedicated to helping women survivors of sexual abuse and violence that provides training and counseling at the community level aimed at prevention of the crime, freedom from violence, and treatment for victims of abuse. She graduated from the University of Central America with a degree in sociology and completed a special studies program in the construction of peace and violence.

¶4. (U) Date of Birth: November 13, 1967

¶5. (U) Contact information: Centro de Estudios Internacionales, Managua, Nicaragua, 505 278 5413

¶6. (SBU) Justification: Zoilamerica Narvaez is still living with the emotional, physical, and psychological wounds she endured after nearly twenty years of domestic sexual abuse and the subsequent denial of due process. Her pain continued with attacks on her personal character, family rupture, and estrangement from her own mother after she went public with the accusations against her step-father Daniel Ortega. When she first brought her case against her step-father and leader of the Sandinista Party to the Nicaraguan courts in 1998, the judge agreed with her petition for a trial, but Daniel Ortega subsequently invoked parliamentary immunity to avoid going to trial.

¶7. (SBU) Despite the repeated denial of due process in the national courts, threats against her life, and attacks on her character, Zoilamerica has persevered in her quest for

justice. Her unprecedented action of publicly denouncing the leader of the Sandinista party in 1998 at great personal risk, and her continued efforts to bring the case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) demonstrates her tremendous personal courage and her conviction that the lack of justice applied in her case will only encourage political and social impunity for sexual offenders, and deny the rights of other women who suffer from similar abuse. Her struggle is no longer against Daniel Ortega, but rather against the precedent her case has set for the action of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, and the denial of due process. Rather than withdrawing in silence and living the life of a victim, she is standing up for justice, human rights, dignity, and legal reform to protect the rights of victims of abuse. She believes in working with other survivors and created a foundation Sobrevivientes (Survivors) dedicated to helping others who have suffered sexual violence--women, girls, and men--heal and rebuild their lives. She has also worked with ex-combatants from the war of the 1980s--because they too are survivors. She believes that this healing is an "urgent task in Nicaragua," to which she wants to dedicate her professional life.

18. (SBU) We recognize that this nomination could be controversial and politically-sensitive, given the prominence and status of the individuals involved. Nonetheless, Post's ad hoc selection committee felt that Zoilamerica Narvaez was the best example of a woman of courage according to the selection criteria provided.

19. (U) Embassy Managua's officer responsible for women's issues is Ms. Irene Marr: phone: 505 266-6010, email: marrif@state.gov

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